WEAR YOUR ANSWERING MACHINE ON YOUR BELT:

The NEC Provider vs. The Motorola Advisor

by David Boles

Throw away your home answering machine. It's out-dated and ordinary. The uncommon solution to receiving messages is here. Today, you can wear on your belt, a cordless, wireless, answering machine the weight and size of a deck of cards! No longer will you be tethered to a home machine. Never again will you have to search down a touch-tone phone to retrieve your personal and business messages. Now, you'll be instantly able to get all your messages while walking down the street, riding in a cab, during a meeting, or even while riding inside an elevator.

This magic box that allows you to be touched anywhere in the Nation is called an *Alphanumeric Pager*, and I call this new concept of staying in touch *Alpha Answering*. Instead of getting a voice message recorded on a tape at home, Alpha Answering electronically and invisibly taps you on the shoulder anywhere. The message is broadcast to

your Pager from a transmitter the same way a radio station sends its signal to your stereo. The message will appear on your Pager's display as text: It's an electronic "While You Were Out" note you get while you're forever "in!"

Access to information is an issue of control: You can screen your calls with an answering machine and decide if you want to talk to the person, call them back later, or simply ignore them. An Alphanumeric Pager allows you the same message screening freedom. Unlike a Numeric Pager that only provides a phone number for you to call back, (the <u>caller</u> is in control because <u>you</u> have to call the number to get the "information") an Alphanumeric Pager allows <u>you</u> to read your messages at your leisure. <u>You</u> decide if the situation warrants action, not the caller.

There are three ingredients you need to set up successful Alpha Answering:

First, you need to pick a Carrier. A Paging Carrier invisibly delivers messages to your Pager. Some Carriers that currently support Alphanumeric Paging are: PageNet, MobileComm, SkyTel, PageAmerica and Metromedia. Your cost for Alpha Answering can range from $12.00 to $96.00 a month, depending upon the number of messages you receive, service coverage you choose (local, regional or Nationwide) and if you decide to buy or rent the Pager. We'll take a deep look at the price and service of Paging Carriers in the next article.

The second ingredient to setting up Alpha Answering is Dispatch: How can people broadcast a private message to you? One way is via an Operator. Instead of having people call and leave a message on your answering machine, they'll call an 800 number and give the message to a Dispatch Operator. The Operator will read back the message to your caller for accuracy, and then send you the message in seconds. Or, if your caller has access to a computer, modem, and Paging software, they can dial directly into the Paging Company's phone terminal and send you an instant, wireless, electronic message on their own.

The third ingredient is the most important: What brand of Alphanumeric Pager should you pick? The Pager is your 24 hour lifeline to information, so it's important that the Pager you choose to use is tough, reliable, and easy to operate. The rest of this article will compare and contrast two Alphanumeric Pagers: The Motorola Advisor vs. The NEC Provider.

TEST SET UP: Both Motorola and NEC built me Pagers on PageNet's National channel so I'd have a Provider and an Advisor programmed to receive identical messages. I paid for PageNet's Nationwide service and for access to the National Dispatch Center so I could test message reception via an Operator. Fitzgerald Telecom's *InfoRad*, gave me a copy of their fantastic software Paging program, *AlphaPage 2001*, so I could send the Pagers messages from my Toshiba 3300SL laptop computer. Here are the results, score by score, of my Pager competition.

MESSAGE RECEPTION: I live in New York City. Sometimes, Pagers have a sensitivity problem inside large buildings and they can miss messages. Both Pagers picked up every numeric and text message sent. I got various Pages while inside a high-rise, a basement, a movie theatre and inside my apartment. Neither Pager had a reception problem. Winner? Tie.

SIZE AND WEIGHT: The NEC Provider is lighter and slimmer than the Motorola Advisor. Winner? The NEC Provider.

SCREEN: Both Pagers have a four line display, but NEC's screen is 20% larger than Motorola's. Motorola's LCD screen uses thick, black letters on a green background. NEC's LCD screen places thin, bluish letters on a grey background. Winner? The NEC Provider.

CONTROL BUTTONS: NEC has four plastic buttons, and to read a message, you hit one button once; to delete a message, you hit three buttons a total of six times. Motorola has seven rubber action keys, and to read a message, you hit one button twice; to delete a message, you hit two buttons a total of six times. Winner? The NEC Provider.

READING A MESSAGE IN THE DARK: NEC has an electronic eye that automatically senses darkness and kicks in a weak, purple, backlight. Punch a button on the Motorola for over a second and you've activated a bright, and intense blue backlight. Winner? The Motorola Advisor.

TONE ALERT: Motorola allows you to pick an escalating alert, a short chirp or a long, loud alert tone. NEC has a straight tone or an escalating, double tone alert than can sound like a siren. Winner? The Motorola Advisor.

FLASH ALERT: NEC's alert light is a vibrant red and, while in vibration mode, the light will flash continually if you have an unread message. Motorola's alert light is small, dim, and every two minutes the light will flash <u>once</u> if you have an unread message. Winner? The NEC Provider.

VIBRATION ALERT: Both Pagers use the same type of motor for vibration alert. Motorola's vibe is less robust than NEC's. NEC's stronger vibe could be due to its lighter weight and smaller size. Winner? The NEC Provider.

IS YOUR PAGER ON? You have to hit a button on the NEC to see if the Pager is on or off. Motorola has an eternal LCD target icon that shows you the Pager is on and able to receive messages without hitting any action keys. Winner? The Motorola Advisor.

BATTERY LIFE: Each Pager uses one AAA battery. Motorola lasted five weeks on a single battery. NEC lasted only three weeks on one battery. Winner? The Motorola Advisor.

ALARM CLOCK: Motorola can be set like an alarm clock to either vibrate and/or beep to remind you of an important meeting or to wake you up in the morning. The NEC has no alarm capability. Winner? The Motorola Advisor.

TOUGHNESS AND DURABILITY: Each Pager was dropped three times from a four foot height. No scratches, cracks or chips. Winner? Tie.

SCREEN REPLACEMENT: The most vulnerable part of any Pager is its LCD. If you scratch Motorola's screen, the Pager will have to be sent to a Motorola repair center, and it'll cost you $50.00 to replace the LCD. NEC's LCD is protected by a thin, plastic shield. Scratch that shield, and the LCD is still intact. NEC's shield can be replaced locally for only $10.00. Winner? The NEC Provider.

HOLSTER: Each Pager can be carried in a holster that clips to your belt. NEC's horizontal holster lets you use all four fingers, thumb, and palm to pull the Pager out to read a message. Motorola offers a vertical holster and you can only use two fingers and a thumb to remove the Pager, so the Dropped-Pager-Ratio could be higher for Motorola. NEC's holster also extends farther away from the body than Motorola's. If you're fat, Motorola will cut into your side more than NEC. Winner? The NEC Provider.

USER PROGRAMMING: Motorola allows you to program alerts and alarms from the Pager's function screen. NEC doesn't have a way for you to change alerts or alarms. Winner? The Motorola Advisor.

STATUS INDICATORS: The small NEC status line has a 24 hour clock format and only tells you the day of the week. NEC also has an "In Range" icon on the status line that informs you if the Pager is able to receive messages from your Carrier's transmitter. The bigger Motorola status line doesn't have an "In Range" icon, but its clock is in the standard 12 hour AM/PM format and the date appears as: 5/25/93. Winner? The Motorola Advisor.

MESSAGE MANAGEMENT: NEC has a 40 message capacity and can save 39 messages. Motorola has a 20 message capacity, a 10 message "history dump" and a 10 message "personal vault." Winner? The NEC Provider.

MOTOROLA'S BEST UNIQUE FEATURE: Motorola has the capacity to print all or some of its Pages to your printer from your computer via a special device you purchase separately. Called *PrintPal*, this feature allows you to save your Pages as hard copy for future reference.

NEC'S BEST UNIQUE FEATURE: NEC has created and stored "Canned Messages" *inside* the Provider. You can get an Alpha message from a touch-tone phone *without* having to use a Dispatch Operator or a computer. This canned message feature makes the NEC Provider a "Numeric Pager" that can fire pre-programmed Alpha messages in addition to receiving regular Alpha text messages. NEC provides 61 pre-programmed messages like: "MEETING RESCHEDULED FOR." Here's how to send a Canned Message:

Have a caller dial your Pager from a touch-tone phone and punch in "**36" followed by "1200." This message would then appear on your Pager: "MEETING RESCHEDULED FOR 1200." The "**" before the Canned Message number is a code your Paging Carrier needs to help fire the Alpha Page to you. NEC also allows you to program ten messages of your choosing, and you need not purchase additional software in order to utilize the feature.

Here's how I set up my personal Canned Messages:

01 = Call Machine
02 = Call Bennahum
03 = Call Gelblum
04 = Call Duff
05 = Call Stern
06 = Call Janna Home
07 = Call Janna Work
08 = Where are you?
09 = JS on way home!
10 = JS Got your Msg!

If My Agent needs to contact me, he calls my Pager and punches in "**02" from a touch-tone phone, and in less than 20 seconds I receive the Alpha message "CALL BENNAHUM" on my Pager.

Beware, however, that not all Carriers are able to support the special "**" code at this time for *NEC's Double Star Canned Message Protocol.*

FINAL SCORE: NEC 8. Motorola 7. Tie 2. While some points may weigh more heavily in favor of one Pager over the other for you, this is one decision you'll make that can't be wrong!

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